# PEASANT LIFE IN ITALY

## MEN AND WOMEN LABOR IN FIELDS FROM DAWN TILL DARK.

**Sunday Not a Day of Rest—A Little Meat on Holidays—No Schooling For Children—The Houses of the Peasantry—Food of a Family.**

From sunny Italy came the anarchist who slew the Empress Elizabeth, President Carnot, Prime Minister Canovas and finally Humbert himself. In sunny Italy is probably the rankest growth of anarchy and socialism in all Europe. And in the sunny plains and valleys of northern Italy is what perhaps is the worst condition of serfdom that exists in Europe today. Here in the provinces that border on the river Po—Lombardy, Venetia and Emilia—the peasantry stagger under burdens so depressing and unbending that it is no wonder that the extract from this human press is anarchy and socialism. It is in these provinces that the ferment of socialism has worked the most. Here the peasants are organized more or less completely into socialistic groups. Whatever of worth there was in the old system of labor in these provinces disappeared twenty years ago when many of the old nobles were forced to give up their landed estates because of the fall in price of wheat and cattle, due largely to American competition. With the ruin of the nobles came that of many of the tenant farmers and small proprietors, who were compelled to leave the fertile and smiling country and go into the towns for work, or else emigrate to America, there to begin life anew.

The field laborers of Italy are divided into two classes, the obbligati, who are hired by the year, and the disobbligati, who are employed by the day. The former class, of course, are a little better off than the latter, for their contract runs longer, and they can look further ahead. But in either class the outlook is miserable enough. For not only does the peasant bind himself to work for his owner, but he binds his whole family, with the possible exception of babes, who would be included, except that they can produce nothing, and therefore are left in the corners of the fields. For this reason, that an employer can get the services of an entire family for the price of one man, an unmarried man, or the man with a wife and no children, is at a great disadvantage, for work for him is not to be had as long as there are unemployed families at hand. Yet another hard feature of this system is that the head of the family must stipulate, if he has unmarried daughters, that they shall not marry for the period of time which the contract has to run.

A day's work in this part of sunny Italy is from 4 in the morning to 9 at night—that is, from the first flush of dawn to the last light to be had from the setting sun. There is no Sunday in the calendar of the Italian peasant. On the day of the week which all Christendom observes, as on other days, he is in the field at 4 o'clock in the morning, and between 7 and 8 has his breakfast; he gets an hour at midday and half an hour at 5 or 6 o'clock, and then he works on until he no longer can see.

The women go into the fields with the men. They hoe in the maize fields, feed the cattle and cultivate the flax. If the children are babes they can do nothing—to the great sorrow of the employer, for they eat, if ever so little, but do not produce. But when they get to be a few years old they are useful in looking after the pigs, etc., and as soon as possible they are sent to work with their parents. The situation in the green fields of Italy is about as complete a refutation of the Malthusian theory as its most ardent opponent could desire, for it is the man with many children who gets the most out of life as it is lived in sunny Italy.

The wages of the peasant's family are partly in money and partly in kind, and he has the privilege of rent free. In cash he gets from $15 to $20 a year; in kind he get fourteen bushels of maize, seven bushels of wheat and from 200 to 250 bundles of firewood. If he is in a vineyard section he receives in addition 800 to 900 pounds of grapes, while in other sections he gets six to nine bushels of rye. He may get some rice, which he mixes with the millet to produce the indigestible bread which is responsible for the disease called pellagra.

Then he may have the privilege of a little patch of ground on which he may raise maize, two-thirds of which goes to the employer, and he may raise silk worms, too.

So the average peasant's family of six persons may earn altogether from $120 to $125 a year.

The house of the Italian peasant usually contains several other families. A lodging consists of a kitchen, a bed room and two other small rooms. In the older houses oiled paper answers for a window, and the houses are damp, moldy and smoky.

Of course the food of a family whose united income is about six cents a day is bound to be rather meager. Polenta, which is flour of maize cooked in water, is the main dish. Breakfast consists of polenta and a little cheese. For dinner there is polenta and bacon soup, with perhaps fish from the brook, or eggs. At 5 o'clock polenta and cheese is the meal, and at supper polenta and a salad of the cheapest vegetables. On Christmas and on Easter meat is set on the table sparingly.

The firewood which the peasants get is rarely sufficient to cook with in the summer, and in the winter the family takes refuge in the cow shed, where the employer, under pretense that he provides a light in the stables, lays claim to a portion of the flax spun by the women in the barns.

Of schooling for the children there is none, except in the winter in the villages. Consequently, many of these Italians who come to America in the hopes of bettering their condition can neither read nor write their own language. Great wonder it is if anything good can come out of modern Italy.—New York Press.

### Making a Tunnel End Meet.

It is quite apparent that to dig a tunnel from two sides and make both ends meet is a delicate problem, says Eugene P. Lyle in Everybody's Magazine. Should they happen not to meet, it would be an expensive wandering in the mountain to find them and get them together. But fortunately there is a guide as true and unbendable as mathematics. This is an imaginary straight line between two points. One point is a little observatory-shed on the bank of the Rhone, with a spy-glass pointing horizontally toward Italy. The other point is a smiliar little observatory on the bank of the Doveria in Italy, with a glass towards Switzerland. Between the two points rises in Simplon mountain mass. But the straight line goes through just the same, for it is only an imaginary straight line. It is, however, steadily turning into a reality—that is, the tunnel. And if it were not for the grade of the tunnel, then some day the observatory in Switzerland could look through the mountain at the observatory in Italy. It will be objected, however, that we went around a curve in the tunnel. In fact, there are two curves, but they do not affect the straight-line proposition.

There is a small tunnel which joins the main tunnel some hundred metres or 109 yards inside. It is called the locating tunnel, and faithfully follows the imaginary straight line. The main tunnel finishes its curve at this hundred-metre point, and thence continues along the straight line to the corresponding curve at the other end, where again, the straight line is completed by a second locating tunnel.

### Our Biggest Gun.

Some spectacular particulars are given of the United States gun, which will preserve America's inalienable right to possess the "biggest thing on earth." It will weigh 126 tons, will have a length of forty-nine feet three inches, and a diameter—fine by degrees and beautifully less—varying from sixty inches to twenty-eight inches. It will be able to fire its five-foot-four-inch projectile an extreme distance of nearly twenty-one miles—20,978 miles is the exact figure—and a projectile fired at the elevation required for this distance will attain a height of 30,516 feet, "higher," says the picturesque recorder, "than the combined elevations of Pike's Peak and Mount Blanc." Thus the record distance fired by a Krupp 9.2-inch gun on April 28, 1892, when twelve and a half miles were covered and a height of 21,456 feet was attained, will be completely surpassed.—London Post.

### Unfortunate For the Lady.

A curious instance of absence of mind is, according to the Liverpool Post, furnished by a certain Oxford don, whose "scholarly abstraction" frequently lands him in difficulties. Dining out one night he suddenly became versed in thought, and for a time sat gazing at his plate, evidently deeply engrossed in some mighty problem. Now it happened that his left-hand neighbor, a portly dame, had the habit of resting her hand on the table, palm down and fingers closed. Suddenly the professor awoke from his brown study, seized his fork, plunged it into the plump paw reposing to the left of his plate, and, beaming genially through his glasses, remarked, "My bread, I think!"

### Sedentary Athletes.

An Englishman who has spent much time in Paris has whimsically observed that the French make excellent athletes, where they can sit down to it. The statement is worthy of notice, says the Paris Messenger. It is generally acknowledged that Frenchmen cannot play cricket, and few of them care for football; but it is a fact that they are skillful horsemen, as may be seen at the polo matches in the Bois de Boulogne. They also row well, as may be seen every day on the Seine; and, above all, they cycle well, as may be observed all over Paris. And the bottom of all this is "sitting down."

### To Protect Wild Flowers.

Persons interested in wild flowers are endeavoring to create—and to organize—a sentiment for the protection of our native plants, especially near large cities, says the Youth's Companion. The pond lily, trailing arbutus, native orchids, fringed gentian and many of the evergreens have been gathered in Massachusetts for sale in such quantities and so steadily sought by frequenters of suburban woods, that their extinction is threatened. The remedy suggested is that care be used to cut rather than pull the flowers, so that the roots need not be disturbed, and that those who gather rare plants for the market should be discouraged by lack of patronage.

### A Compass in a Guano Bed.

A curious find is reported from one of the Chincha Islands, off the coast of Peru. In a bed of guano an old ship's compass was lately dug up, which, when cleaned, was found to be in working order. The case of the instrument is of brass, and it bears the engraved inscription: "Juo. Warren, Chepeside, City of London, Maker, 1699." The compass has been sent to a museum in Lima.—London News.

## OUR BUDGET OF HUMOR

### The Modern Author.

His pen that never lacks for ink
He drives with eager clutch;
If he should ever stop to think
He couldn't write so much.
—Washington Star.

### A Definition.

Little Elmer—"Pa, what is an optimist?"

Prof Broadhead—"A person who is constantly expecting the unexpected to happen."—Leslie's Weekly.

### A Paternal Indiscretion.

Mr. Jones—"Our boys don't seem to respect me as they should."

Mrs. Jones—"Well, you oughtn't to have let them find out that you couldn't fly a box kite."—Detroit Free Press.

### A Neighborly Call.

"Have you called on the new neighbors next door yet, Mrs. Glibbins?"

"Yes, I have. Their boy threw something and hit my Willie, and I called on them for an explanation."—Philadelphia Bulletin.

### Benny's Hedge.

"Benny Bloombumper, how do we know that the moon is 240,000 miles distant from the earth?"

Benny (alarmed at the teacher's manner) replied, "Y-y-you said so yourself, sir."—Tit-Bits.

### Would Die Hard.

"I am sorry," said the physician to the ossified man, "but you cannot live long."

"Well," replied the ossified man, "when the time comes I will die hard."—Ohio State Journal.

### Difficult to Please.

Dribbles—"Is it true that the editor of Blank's Magazine is a particular friend of yours?"

Scribbles—"Yes, very particular. He rejects everything I send him."—Chicago Record-Herald.

### Slight Repairs Needed.

Aged Beau—"William, are my eyebrows on straight and my ears properly crimped?"

Valet—"Yes, sir, but your left shoulder has slipped down a little. There, sir, you are quite correct."—Chicago Tribune.

### Within Limits.

"Money is like blood," said the Spendthrift Nephew, "it isn't any good unless it keeps in circulation."

"Yes," answered the Wise Uncle, "but you shouldn't let either of them get away from you."—Baltimore American.

### A Genius.

"You say he has an inventive turn of mind? What has he devised that is so wonderful?"

"Nothing; but he has six new excuses every week for being late at the office in the morning."—Chicago Record-Herald.

### The Real Cause.

Miss Gabbey—"I suppose it was the kisses he stole from Mrs. Gidday on the porch that evening that started all this scandal."

Mr. Short—"Not at all. It was the gossips who saw the kisses stolen."—Philadelphia Press.

### Dropping.

Church—"I must go and drop a line to my wife."

Gotham—"I thought you said she was up in the mountains?"

Church—"So she is."

Gotham—"Well, how can you drop a line upward?"—Yonkers Statesman.

### The Way of the World.

Horton—"You used to think Bember was a great friend of yours. I notice he never offers to help you now that you need help."

Snobel—"No; but then, you must not forget how free he was to offer me assistance when I didn't need it."—Boston Transcript.

### Evidence Still in Sight.

"You oughtn't to complain, ma'am," the busy grocer said, "if only one basket of those peaches turned out bad. Three dozen boxes of 'em rotted on my hands last Saturday."

"I believe him, mamma," said Tommy, in a loud whisper. "His han' look like it."—Chicago Tribune.

### Then He Gave Up.

"What is your age?" asked the great coarse business man of the applicant for the position of cashier.

"Well-er—I can't tell you that," she replied.

"Do you know what day you were born on?"

"Oh, yes; I was born on a Sunday."—Philadelphia Press.

### A Boy of Promise.

"Johnny," said the teacher after reading the youngster's "note from his father" excusing his absence from school the day before, "it seems to me your father's writing is very like your."

"Yes," replied Johnny, unabashed, "you know they say I take after Pop in everything."—Catholic Standard and Times.

### None Here.

Tired of the long-winded oratory of the attorney for the defense, the judge interrupted him.

"Mr. Sharke," he said, "may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly, your Honor, what is it?"

"Language," said the judge, "we are told, is given to conceal thought, or words to that effect. Inasmuch as you don't seem to have any thought to conceal, I would like to know why you are talking?"—Chicago Tribune.